linktr.ee/rattlingthecages

In conversation with Rattling the Cages co-editor Eric King, former political prisoners Jake Conroy and Claude Marks discuss their experiences in prison and how they've stayed active and engaged in liberation struggles after being released, including through the collection and archiving our histories of resistance.

This event was a fundraiser for the Freedom Archives

freedomarchives.org

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AK PRESS

RATTLING THE CAGES

ORAL HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN POLITICAL PRISONERS

"Post-Prison Activism & Archiving Resistance"

ERIC KING | CLAUDE MARKS | JAKE CONROY

Originally hosted as a live conversation by Firestorm Books,
recording available on Firestorm's youtube channel:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eegjqLeYsE
October 13, 2024

Published by AK Press, *Rattling the Cages: Oral Histories of North American Political Prisoners* is a project of abolitionists Josh Davidson and Eric King. The book is filled with the experience and wisdom of over thirty current and former North American political prisoners. It provides first-hand details of prison life and the political commitments that continue to lead prisoners into direct confrontation with state authorities and institutions.

The original pamphlet from the U.S. Prisoner, Labor and Academic Solidarity Delegation to Palestine March 24 to April 2, 2016 can be found at:
www.freedomarchives.org/Pal/PP.Booklet.AR.Eng.Web.pdf

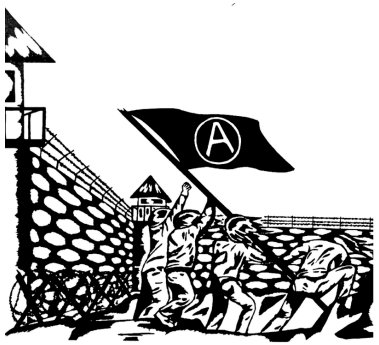
Another pamphlet from the delegation, titled "For the Love of Palestine Stories of Women, Imprisonment and Resistance," edited by Diana Block and Anna Henry, can be found here: *www.freedomarchives.org/Pal/womenprisoners.pdf*

Sheikh Khader Adnan, "Khader Adnan expresses solidarity with 30,000 hunger strikers in California prisons," *electronicintifada.net/blogs/nora-barrows-friedman/khader-adnan-expresses-solidarity-30000-hunger-strikers-california*

Transcription, editing, and formatting by ev, Danielle, Josh, & Jeremy with help from Firestorm Books.

all labor volunteered

with whatever weapons at hand



Support Political Prisoners

As you've heard & read, it is vital that we support the political prisoners of our liberation movements. Providing support builds bridges across and through prison bars, giving those locked inside a connection to the outside world. Your support matters.

Get involved. Write to a political prisoner—a simple letter provides a needed escape. Visit them in prison. Ask what a political prisoner needs and do what you can to help them. Offer them support.

Visit the NYC Anarchist Black Cross website (*nycabc.wordpress.com*) and learn more about those currently imprisoned for political reasons.

Buy a *Certain Days: Freedom for Political Prisoners* calendar (*certaindays.org*).

Visit your local Books Through Bars group and send books to those incarcerated (*booksthroughbarsnyc.org/resources*).

Join your nearest Anarchist Black Cross group (*abcf.net*).

Visit *rattlingthecages.com* to learn more.

Eric King is a father, poet, author, and activist. In December 2023 he was released from the supermax ADX prison after spending nearly ten years as a political prisoner for an act of protest over the police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. He was held in solitary confinement for years and was met with violence by guards throughout his incarceration. Eric has published three zines: *Battle Tested* (2015), *Antifa in Prison* (2019), and *Pacing in My Cell* (2019). His sentencing statement is included in the book *Defiance: Anarchist Statements Before Judge and Jury* (2019). Eric now works as a paralegal for the Bread and Roses Legal Center.

Claude Marks was imprisoned for his involvement in an escape conspiracy to free Puerto Rican independentista and political prisoner Oscar López Rivera. Claude has worked in radical media since the late 1960s and is co-founder and co-director of the Freedom Archives. In 2016, Claude traveled to Palestine as part of an anti-prison delegation that focused on political imprisonment and solidarity between prisoners in the US and Palestinian. He has also worked to free numerous political prisoners and continues to fight for prison abolition.

Jake Conroy is a longtime animal rights activist who was sentenced to four years in prison for his involvement in the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC USA) campaign. Jake has been involved in various forms of activism since the mid-1990s, working on campaigns both local and international. The SHAC 7, as he and his codefendants became known, were tried as domestic terrorists for running a website and supporting controversial tactics and ideologies. Since his release, he has remained tirelessly committed to the struggle on many fronts. He is currently the host of the Three Minute Thursdays show on his Cranky Vegan YouTube channel and is cohost of Radicals and Revolutionaries, an oral history podcast about direct action movements. Jake also contributed to the book *Rattling the Cages: Oral Histories of North American Political Prisoners*.

Libertie Valance: Welcome to everybody. Thanks so much for being here tonight, or this afternoon, I guess, depending on where you are. My name is Libertie, and I'm a member of the Firestorm Collective. We're excited to host former political prisoners Eric King, Jake Conroy, and Claude Marks to discuss staying active in liberation struggles after release and also the importance of archiving our histories of resistance. This is part of a series that we've been doing with our friends at AK Press and Eric and Josh, the editors of *Rattling the Cages*.

Firestorm is a 16-year-old radical bookstore owned and operated by a queer feminist collective in southern Appalachia on the land of the Cherokee people. We strive to feature books and events that reflect the interests and the needs of marginalized communities in the South. We're also continuing to do book events virtually, some of them anyway, because we love to be able to connect with people at a distance and we know that for a lot of folks in our community the accessibility of online programming is still highly desirable. Our schedule's a little up in the air right now because of flooding, but if you're interested in keeping up with our future events follow us on social media.

Just a note: this is a little unconventional here. I am in Asheville, North Carolina—that's where Firestorm is located—and we have had truly devastating flooding in the last two weeks that's resulted in some pretty challenging conditions. So I'm here in an apartment instead of in a bookstore. I'm trying to find good internet, and it's possible that my internet might drop at some point, in which case Josh will step in. But Asheville continues to not have any running water, and I think about a third of our community is actually still without electricity. So it's a wild time, and there's a whole conversation there about climate change and inequity for another time.

We're so incredibly pleased to have all three of y'all with us tonight. Thanks for making the time! I'm going to pass it off to Eric who's going to run the show here. Thanks, y'all.

Eric King: Thank you, thank you, thank you. Claude, Jake—thank you both so much for joining me. I consider you both good friends and comrades, so this is a real joy for me to have you—at least you, Claude. [*Laughter all around.*] What I'd like to start with is that both of you were, in my view, a part of mass movements, whether it's anti-imperialist, anti-government,

Rattling the Cages

1) Political Prisoners, Mass Incarceration, & Abolition
Eric King, Herman Bell, David Gilbert, Susan Rosenberg

2). Continuing the Struggle Inside & Out
Eric King, Ashanti Alston, Ray Luc Levasseur

3) Antifascism Behind Bars
Eric King and David Campbell

4) Black August & Prisoner Support
Eric King, dequi kioni-sadiki, Harold Taylor

5) Eric King in Conversation with James Kilgore
Eric King, James Kilgore

6) Post-Prison Activism & Archiving Resistance
Eric King, Jake Conroy, Claude Marks

7) Until All Are Free
Eric King, Jason Hammond, Jeremy Hammond

8) Revolutionary Women Behind Bars
Eric King, Linda Evans, Laura Whitehorn, Nicole Kissane

9) Becoming Politicized in Prison
Eric King, Josh Davidson, Hector Rodriguez, Farhan Ahmed

10) Rattling the Cages: How We Dit It & How You Can Too
Eric King, Sara Falconer, Josh Davidson

11) Abolition Is a Family Affair
Eric King, Sharon Shoatz, susie day, Rochell Bricker

12) Looking Back at the George Jackson Brigade
Mark Cook, Janine Bertram, Eric King

all conversations are available @FirestormCoop on youtube

Write to Political Prisoners mentioned in this conversation

for a monthly updated list of political prisoners & their addresses visit

nycabc.wordpress.com

anti-animal cruelty, so this is a two-part question. I'd like to know, when you were free, and you saw the repression coming down from the state on others—you saw them arresting people, giving sentences—did that have any impact on how you viewed your movement or your own participation within it?

Claude Marks: First of all, thanks for having me. As you know, it took a lot of arm-twisting to get me to agree. I think, Jake, you probably were the linchpin of the whole thing. In any case, at the core of your question is really trying to understand the context in which we organize and the reasons why we organize. If we're not happy with the way the state, the corporations, the ruling class, are handling things, then we have a responsibility to take that on and try to change it. The nature of the state teaches us, if we study it—which I think is an important thing—it teaches us that, in essence—because, especially here in the US, we're dealing with a state that has a history of being settler-colonial—the state arrives at power through brutality and violence, stealing land, and genocide, enslaving people.

If you come to power by those means, you're also going to hold on to power by those means. So to me that's a fundamental thing about how we see ourselves in relationship to whatever aspect of struggle that we're engaging in, because if we're challenging their power we can't be shocked by repression. Repression is the essence of how they come to power and how they maintain it. An inherent part of disagreeing with the state and its values, and fighting for something more just and equitable in a different kind of world, means taking that on in whatever capacity one decides to do it. But we shouldn't be shocked if they aren't playing by the rules. They're making the rules in order to maintain power.

Because in the absence of the rules, and in the absence of compliance to the rules, what else is there but the military, the police, all the various agencies of the state that are about reinforcing those power relations. So demonstrating is one thing, but it's in that context that it takes place. Because part of the theme of our getting together and chatting has to do with sticking with it in the long run, I mean, this struggle to change the nature of certainly US imperialism—and the US is probably the most violent empire, historically, that's ever existed. I mean, look at how they're supplying the arms for the Zionist genocide today, for example. They're not playing, by any moral standard, a fair game here. This is not a

democratic process in which you get to choose the kind of values that you live under. That's not what we're dealing with.

We're dealing with parties that are in control that essentially agree on maintaining empire through violence. Here, we are realizing that it's going to take more than one or two generations to really change that. So it's not just about individual decisions, it's about sticking with it. It's about a building a movement that has longevity, understands the nature of the state, and builds a capacity ultimately in the long run to change the power relations. And that doesn't mean that they're going to change their minds and give it up because of something that happens in an electoral thing. Because they're not.

Eric King: Alright, thank you. Jake?

Jake Conroy: First off, I want to give a big shout out to Firestorm. As was mentioned, I was down there. It's such an incredible place, and I was really inspired by the community and all the work that's going on there. Then to see that whole area just get devastated was obviously very difficult to watch from afar, and I can only imagine it's even worse being there. But seeing Firestorm's response, such an amazing example of mutual aid, has been really inspiring to me to watch from afar. If there's any way that myself or the rest of us can help, I hope that's passed on. It's also amazing to be here with Eric and Claude, two people I really admire.

Thanks so much. I've already forgotten what the question is. Repeat it one more time.

Eric King: To run it short, when you were free and you saw the government repression coming down, did that impact how you viewed your movement or your role within it?

Jake Conroy: Yeah. When I first got involved in activism in the mid '90s, I predominantly was really involved in the animal rights movement, but it wasn't really animal rights literature that I was given. It was history of other movements, and it was the importance of security culture, and it was this stuff that the government and corporations have done to stop social change in the past, and is currently doing, and could be doing in the future. I don't feel like that's done probably as much as it was back in my day, and perhaps in Claude's day. It feels like that is just kind of these

festival arresting dozens of people. At least 61 Defend the Atlanta Forest / Stop Cop City protestors have been charged with domestic terrorism under RICO charges, including an Atlanta bail fund.

Freedom Archives — The Freedom Archives is a non-profit educational archive located in Berkeley dedicated to the preservation and dissemination of historical audio, video, and print materials documenting progressive movements and culture from the 1960s to the 1990s. Offering a youth development program focused on engagement with these historical materials and providing media production training, we also produce original documentaries and educational resources for use by schools and organizations as tools for community building and social justice work. The materials housed at the Freedom Archives—over 12,000 hours of audio and video recordings—include: weekly news, poetry, music programs; in-depth interviews and reports on social and cultural issues; numerous voices from behind prison walls and recordings of diverse demonstrations and activists. We are also in the process of scanning and cataloging thousands of historical documents, pamphlets, journals, newspapers, and other print materials from many radical organizations and movements which enrich our media holdings. The digitized materials in our archives are free for use and constitute a compelling record of 50 years of recorded sound, images and cultural diversity. The collections are an invaluable resource for young people and students, teachers, diverse community organizations, filmmakers, activists, historians, artists, media outlets, and researchers. *For more information:* freedomarchives.org/about/

voices of people most affected by mass incarceration and the growth of the prison-industrial complex. Through our grassroots organizing, we are building a powerful political movement to win full restoration of our human and civil rights. Learn more about us by watching our videos Locked Up, Locked Out and Enough is Enough below. *For more information:* prisonerswithchildren.org/about-aouon/

Casey Goonan — a dedicated community educator, writer, distroist, and printer who has committed their life to struggles for liberation. A federal investigation by the FBI and several other law enforcement agencies resulted in Casey's arrest for alleged politically motivated "crimes." Since June 17 2024, Casey has been incarcerated at Santa Rita Jail facing federal felonies that could result in up to 20 years of imprisonment. Freeing Casey will likely be a long fight. Just as Casey has persistently for years cared for, supported, and struggled alongside incarcerated comrades, we aim to replicate these actions in solidarity with Casey as they continue their struggle from the other side of the wall. *For more information:* freecaseynow.noblogs.org/

Florida 4 — 4 queer activists who faced up to 12 years in Federal prison on charges related to graffiti at a Pregnancy Crisis Center, aka a building funded by church and state to dissuade people from getting abortions. The Department of Justice is charging them under the FACE Act, a criminal law passed in the 1990's to stop threats, violence and blockades against health clinics that offered like abortions, screenings, contraception and other services under attack by religious extremists in the USA. There are also Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation, known also as a SLAPP suits being brought by a Miami-based Christian anti-abortion Crisis Pregnancy Center called Heartbeat of Miami as well as the state of Florida against the accused apparently intended to have a chilling effect and minimize their ability to defend themselves against the Federal indictments. Caleb Freestone was sentenced to one year in prison September, 2024. Amber Smith Stuart and Annarella Rivera were both sentenced to 30 days in prison. The fourth defendant is taking their case to trial. *For more information:* sflarc.blogspot.com

Stop Cop City — a decentralized movement in Atlanta, Georgia, whose goal is to stop construction of the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center (known as Cop City) by the Atlanta Police Foundation and the City of Atlanta. The proposed location for the facility is the Old Atlanta Prison Farm. The movement has involved forest defense tactics like tree-sits, encampments, industrial sabotage, as well as broader tactics like acting against contractors involved, mass demonstrations, petitions, etc. Georgia State Troopers and other agencies launched a raid against forest defenders on January 18, 2023 and assassinated a young forest-defender named Tortugita (Manuel Terán). After a protest on March 5, 2023 during a week of action convergence, construction and police equipment were destroyed, and police launched a raid on a nearby music

weird conspiratorial things, like that would never happen to me. But I think the reality is, as Claude has said, it is a state that is not interested in losing, and they are going to not just not fight fairly, they're going to fight dirty, and they're going to fight in really nasty, nasty ways.

So, I think, as an activist, I kind of learned early on to expect that kind of repression and oppression, and to prepare for it, to think about it, and understand that that could come my way. As time went on I saw it more and more. I can remember, I think I got involved in activism in 1995, and I know that the first time that the government or private investigators or corporate interests were following me or monitoring me and/or my friends was 1996. So it was less than a year, and that went as long as 2013.

What's happened since then, I don't really know. But there was always from the very beginning an understanding that they are out to stop you. And I think to a certain extent that definitely makes you look at organizing differently, it makes you think about community differently in positive ways and negative ways. Specifically, when we were doing the Stop Huntington Animal Cruelty Campaign, the federal government said that we were the biggest threat to the security of the United States, which was pretty laughable. But they were very nervous and upset and angered by what we were doing and how much we were able to affect capitalism, how much we were able to get the largest corporations in the world to do what we wanted them to do as a small radical grassroots organization or movement, and we knew that would come with a price.

I think over the course of the five years that we did that campaign we were sued 24 different times. 23 or 24 different times we had federal civil RICO suits brought against all of us for $12 million a piece, and we managed to beat all of those. We managed to navigate our way around those, and I think that put a bit of machismo into the US campaign, where we felt like, "Oh, we can't be stopped." It was kind of like a pounding of the chests. So, when we got the bigger case—the terrorism case—we just thought, "Ah, it's just another one that we'll get around. It'll be fine." It didn't work out that way, and we were all found guilty.

We were the first animal rights group to get hit with terrorism charges. The first organization. There were people that were charged with that particular crime in the past, but we were the first aboveground organization that was targeted with that specific law. We can talk a little

bit more about that if we want. I'm happy to do that. I do think that it is a good reminder that we won 23 or 24 cases, but it was that 25th one that got us. I think that idea of, "Oh, they can't touch us, we're unstoppable" type of thing is a problem, and I think sometimes you can see that kind of mentality seep into our activist spaces, where we're untouchable, or they're not going to be able to do anything. But they are always there. They're always coming after you. They're always coming for you to stop you. It doesn't mean that you can't get around that and beat that, but it means that they will not stop until they get what they want. I'd always thought about it in my organizing, but it wasn't until we got kind of arrogant about it that it caught up with us in a big way.

Eric King: Thank you both. The follow-up question to that is, because this is a prison community support centered talk mostly, I'd like to know if when you did get put down, both of you, how was the support from your respective communities? Did your animal rights community or anti-imperialist or anti-whatever—did your communities show up for you in ways that you felt loved and safe, as much as you can be, and seen? Or did you feel left behind when you went inside?

Claude Marks: Well, I mean, I consider myself to be pretty fortunate in the sense that I had a large community, even though I had been absent from it as an organizer for many years because of choosing to be part of clandestine work. But nevertheless, the politics of our case, the work and solidarity with Black liberation and Puerto Rican independence, things of that nature, there was a pretty vibrant movement all along. For myself personally, I was certainly prepared for imprisonment in the sense of making a choice to do a non-collaborative surrender after many years, mainly because we all wanted to get back to doing public organizing work and were isolated in clandestinity and not being very impactful. So, part of the choice was, "Yeah we're going to take a hit." In making that decision, people were there and stepped up, not just around myself, but certainly my family and my greater collective, which was all being supportive. In my case, a partner and kids. I think the main thing about prison for me was not whether or not I stayed connected, but is was trying to figure out how to do a level of consciousness-building inside, dealing with isolation, being productive both within the prisoner community, but also staying connected to struggles that were happening at the same time outside the walls.

People, Places, Events, & Organizations

James Kilgore — a researcher and activist based in Urbana, Illinois. Jim is the father of two sons and life partner of African historian Terri Barnes. He is the author of six books, including *The Warehouse: A Visual Primer on Mass Incarceration and Understanding Mass Incarceration: A People's Guide to the Key Civil Rights Struggle of Our Time* (2015). He drafted four of those volumes (including this one) during his six and a half years in California prisons as a political prisoner. He is currently a Building Community Power Fellow at Community Justice Exchange and formerly a research fellow at MediaJustice, where he founded the Challenging E-Carceration project. He is also director of advocacy and outreach for FirstFollowers Reentry Program in Champaign, Illinois. Jim also contributed to the book *Rattling the Cages*.

National Jericho Movement — a movement with the defined goal of gaining recognition of the fact that political prisoners and prisoners of war exist inside of the United States, despite the United States' government's continued denial ... and winning amnesty and freedom for these political prisoners. The Jericho Movement grew out of a call for a national march on the White House during Spring Break of 1998 by political prisoner Jalil Muntaqim. The call was made in October of 1996 through the Provisional Government—RepubIic of New Afrika and the New Afrikan Liberation Front, but the organizers decided to use this opportunity to jumpstart a much needed movement to build a national support organization for political prisoners in general. *For more information:* www.thejerichomovement.com

San Francisco 8 — eight former Black Panthers were arrested January 23rd 2007 in California, New York and Florida on charges related to the 1971 killing of a San Francisco police officer. Similar charges were thrown out after it was revealed that police used torture to extract confessions when some of these same men were arrested in New Orleans in 1973. Richard Brown, Richard O'Neal, Ray Boudreaux, and Hank Jones were arrested in California. Francisco Torres was arrested in Queens, New York. Harold Taylor was arrested in Florida. Two of those charged were political prisoners at the time—Herman Bell and Jalil Muntaqim are both in New York State prisons. Harold Taylor and John Bowman (recently deceased) as well as Ruben Scott (thought to be a government witness) were first charged in 1975. But a judge tossed out the charges, finding that Taylor and his two co-defendants made statements after police in New Orleans tortured them for several days employing electric shock, cattle prods, beatings, sensory deprivation, plastic bags and hot, wet blankets for asphyxiation.

All of Us or None — a grassroots civil and human rights organization fighting for the rights of formerly-and currently-incarcerated people and our families. We are fighting against the discrimination that people face every day because of arrest or conviction history. The goal of All of Us or None is to strengthen the

that's basically what I'm doing now, and just continuing on my growth to be a happier person, which is a new goal of mine.

Eric King: Thank you so much, both of you. I always like ending these things by encouraging people to write a prisoner. I always insist on Randy Platt. He's got 14 more years in the federal supermax, and he's my best friend. But any prisoner will do. It doesn't have to be a political one, though it definitely doesn't hurt to support people that are fighting for the causes you believe in. We all need and deserve love. Thank you both so much. This was a real huge blessing for me, getting to talk to my two friends, so thank you. Libertie, if you want to shut it down and get us out of here. Josh?!

Josh Davidson: It's actually me, yes. Libertie's got internet problems so I'm going to be closing us down today. Thank you everyone for coming out. Thank you Claude, Jake, and Eric for this. Sign up for the next talk and support Firestorm. Stay safe and stay dangerous and we'll talk to you next time.

Eric King: I talked to James Kilgore a couple weeks ago, and he said that being underground he was able to function, because, at that time, he was able to get fake ID's and everything, and it wasn't as hard to still have a functioning life underground. My question to him was did being underground feel like its own prison? Would you care to expand on that at all real quick?

Claude Marks: The real question, in my case, is a question about why would someone choose to be part of a clandestine struggle, to be part of trying to build an infrastructure that can function outside the purview of the state. Why is that a defensible, viable, political choice? Not to say that we succeeded at doing that in some tremendous way, but if you think about it—and this harkens back to what I was trying to say about the nature of the state—a successful movement has to function on many levels. Certainly on a mass level, without a doubt.

But certain kinds of work have to function outside that purview of the state by people who aren't identifiable. And in making a choice like that, you're making a choice to be part of a political, and at times a military, functional structure. In deciding to be part of something like that, in the most ideal sense, people are aware of the dangers and the risks to life that are implicit in that. I mean, the state is functioning against mass movements with death squads. We know that. They attacked and executed members of the Black Panther Party. They attacked and executed members of the American Indian Movement. They attacked and executed members of the Chicano-American struggle. They did the same with the Puerto Ricans. Any type of movement that challenges the nature of the state and that tries to exert liberatory politics is going to be thumped. And speaking of thumping, this is Fleet Week in San Francisco, and I just heard the first strafing of San Francisco by a military jet, called a Blue Angel. So, if that happens again you'll know what's happening.

Really, the question isn't how comfortable is it doing clandestine work, it's is that really a viable choice to be made, and how does that fit into one's vision of developing a more impactful revolutionary struggle? What is that about? I'm not saying everybody should do that, or this is the time to do that, or anything like that. But at the time that we made that decision, others had already done that, and others were projecting a rebuilding of a capacity to function in a clandestine way. So, with all the risks that are implied, that's part of what you decide to do if you make that choice for

yourself or as part of a collective process.

Eric King: Okay, thank you. Jake, the Animal Rights and Earth Liberation Movements are in my mind known as being some of the best supported, that the people that support your work show up in a very big, tangible way when those folks are inside. When you went down was that your experience? Did you feel seen and supported while you were inside?

Jake Conroy: Yeah, for sure. It was incredible. I had done political prisoner support before that for years, encouraging people to write letters and do fundraisers and stuff like that. But I had never been on the receiving end of it. I remember like day two that I was in prison, and I'm like, "Where are all the letters? What's going on?" Then I remember the first letter I got, on like day four, and I remember who it was from. It was from a friend of mine named Lance, and he wrote me a letter, and I was like, "Oh, this is amazing." Then, I think by the end of that week I was getting 30, 40, 50 letters a day. Yeah, it didn't keep up like that, but that was my experience, and it was incredible. I never experienced anything like that before.

I think that support is instrumental in surviving, not just figuratively, but literally. It wasn't just getting letters. People sent me books. People donated money so that I could have money on my books to buy things at commissary if I needed them. People, if they could, which was pretty rare, were able to visit. Also, a really important type of support that I got, which we often don't think about, is after I got out and got put into a halfway house.

Eric King: We're going to get to that.

Jake Conroy: Well, nevermind then. But the amazing thing was, as an animal rights activist, I hoped and saw a lot of support from fellow animal rights activists all over the world, and environmental activists. But there also was, like the Jericho Movement listed us with their political prisoners, and beyond just being incredibly grateful for that, I was very honored to see people that I had respected and looked up to and read about since my early days of being an activist. Now, being listed alongside them felt very special, and it felt like I was seen in a much bigger way. It felt like there was a little bit of a feeling of solidarity that I hadn't really felt before and that felt really, really special to me. There were a bunch of times where other movements outside of my own or the adjacent

contact with radical history for the first time or more seasoned researchers. The idea of the larger project is to preserve the history of radical struggle, the voices that are essentially subjugated, that are intentionally hidden from people, in order to give us a sense that there's a continuity to opposing US imperialism and all of the grotesque things in the world, that people have been struggling for a long time, and we have a lot to learn from them if we have access to what they experience and think and have to say, that this is part of growing a movement, from this point forward that we not allow ourselves to become disconnected from all of our ancestors who fought hard and in many cases died in the struggle.

And that's true globally, that the lessons for how to understand the world and how to fight for a better one aren't led from within the empire, they're actually led from those outside the borders that have a lot more to gain, and from that resistance, despite all the odds. Obviously, when you look at what's happening in Palestine, that's a clear example of people who aren't going to fold, irrespective of the level of violence that's being unleashed against them. And that struggle, too, has longevity and history, and fortunately the Archive is a place that you can look into that, as well as other stuff. So check us out, folks.

Eric King: Please donate to the Freedom Archives. Jake, what do you have going on and how can people support it?

Jake Conroy: Nothing. Nothing as cool as Claude. Freedom Archives is amazing. Definitely check it out. I spent the last bit working on a bunch of projects that I suddenly just stopped working on, and I'm figuring out how to start them back up. I'm very close to finishing a book that I wrote about my experiences in prison. I do a YouTube channel that is called the Cranky Vegan—which is a good lesson in pick your username smartly because they'll be stuck with you forever—where I talk about strategies and tactics of grassroots movements, predominantly in the animal rights movement, encouraging people to do more thinking into strategic pressure campaigns. I do a podcast called Radicals & Revolutionaries. I also do a lot of trainings and workshops around the world. I'm very privileged to be able to travel around and do these lectures about my time in prison, about the SHAC campaign, and I also do half-day workshops on how to organize pressure campaigns more strategically in your communities, which I'm happy to do if anyone is interested. So, yeah,

opportunity for me to escape—I was outside those prison walls, outside of my cell, out over the fences into the desert. And those saved my life, figuratively and literally.

So, if you are in a position where you're going in, or you know someone that's going in, or you just support the idea of why those people are in—political prisoners or not—then write them a letter. Write them a letter. Send them a book. Put a couple bucks on their books to buy things. Make a new friend and maintain correspondence with that person. It's the longevity of the support that also is incredibly important.

Eric King: Me and Josh Davidson put out *Rattling the Cages*, and that's a book we put it out while I was in the most restricted prison in the country. We did that because of prison support, because someone cared. He cared enough about me to build a real relationship instead of a tokenized one and that made a big difference in my entire life. And we're still great friends today. This whole thing is happening because of Josh caring enough about all of us. So, that's what I would recommend, too.

Claude Marks: I don't really have that much to add, really. I would underscore what Jake was saying. I feel like the purpose of prison is to disappear people. Our responsibility is to make sure that doesn't happen.

Eric King: Hell yeah. We've got a couple minutes left, so I'd like to talk about what you all have going on right now. I'd like to talk about Freedom Archives. I'd like to talk about YouTube stuff, and raising money for all those projects. Whatever you guys have going on right now, if you could just please let the people know.

Claude Marks: We're actually working on a documentary that is about the Puerto Rican independence movement, told through the voices of former Puerto Rican political prisoners from various political groups that were part of confronting the colonial state, the United States. It's very exciting. We are going to finish a few interviews in Chicago at the end of this month and then start putting stuff together. We've done a couple trips to Puerto Rico, of course, to interview people there. To me that's not unusual and part of a continuum of a theme for me.

But Freedom Archives, which is behind doing this, also is constantly hosting people, whether they're young people who are just coming in

environmental movement really recognized us as political prisoners and people that need support. That was really big for me.

Eric King: Yeah, I'm fresh out, but I'd say 90% of the people I talk to right now are people that supported me when I was inside. You've been out for a little bit. Are you still friends with or in communication with anyone who supported you?

Jake Conroy: Yeah. Claude! [*Laughter all around.*] I mean, I met Claude before going in. That is a whole other amazing story that Claude and I still need to sit down and talk about. He was instrumental in bringing animal rights activists together with the San Francisco Eight, some Black Panthers, which was a whole other amazing, beautiful lesson learned on my journey to wherever I am now. That really meant a lot to me. And Claude was one of the first people I saw when I got out. I was in the halfway house, and I told the halfway house that he helped rehabilitate inmates coming out of prison and adjusting them back to society, which was true. But getting together with Claude while I was in the halfway house, one of the first people I saw when I got out, was really important to me.

I think Claude is a shining example of starting down the road and supporting people and seeing it through. You can see that with people that are still in prison from the '70s and '60s and how much support their communities still provide them decades and decades later, and having that spill over to me was really important and beautiful, as well. There are a lot of people that I wrote when I was in prison I got letters from and I communicated with and became friends with—I got out in 2009, 2010—that I still see and keep in touch with and hang out with and am friends with, both people that I wrote and also people that I met when I was in prison and became friends with on the inside. There are a couple people that I still communicate with.

Eric King: Awesome. Claude was one of the first people to text me when I got out, also. I thought it was fake, I didn't think it was real. That was really nice when Josh hit me up saying, "Claude wants to talk to you." Like, "What? No way!" So, I want to talk about back to when we were inside, when I went and I had a view of the world that I thought was complete, and prison really helped me restructure that. It helped me see things more intersectionally. I didn't come from a movement so maybe

that was natural for you two, but it really helped open my eyes to different struggles and also the struggle of incarceration itself and the impact that has on certain communities much more than it does on my community. It helped me see what happens to trans folks, to queer folks, to people of color, and it really opened my eyes to have a more empathetic approach and a broader view of the movement. So, I'd like to ask both of, you did prison help with your intersectionality? Did it open your eyes to anything maybe that you didn't always think about or that wasn't at the forefront?

Claude Marks: For me, I had the advantage, like Jake, of having done many years of support work for people who were captured as a product of their resistance. Political prisoner work was something that was familiar to me. Some of the more obvious things about prison that one can absorb through doing that certainly helped fortify me before actually going in. Just understanding through developing relationships with people who were locked up in cages you get... It's sort of an unmasking of what that life will be when you realize that that's part of your own future or experience.

To me, that's also a healthy sign to be building movements where people in their normal everyday life stand against the purpose of imprisoning people in the first place, which is to destroy individuals, families, communities, movements, all of which takes place. I mean that's the purpose of isolation and cages, so being prepared is an important aspect of that. Nevertheless, it's a very different life when you're living it day in and day out. Whatever you do to prepare isn't an absolute thing. One of the things that I like to reference, that really underscores for me the lesson of people's basic humanity, the caricature of imprisonment and who's in it as solely about out-of-control violence, never understanding that the perpetrators of that are the people running the place, and the people who are damaged by that process—or any other life challenges beforehand, of course—they're not in a very supportive environment once they land inside.

I don't want to give the idea that there aren't damaged people in prisons who suddenly figure out how to function better socially. On the other hand, for the most part, even people who are heavily damaged by the struggle for survival in an empire like this can and do maintain their basic humanity. And there's a way to deal with them, approach people and

this, that, or the other thing. I have my legal paperwork to prove it. What else did I do? I had nine months to figure out what did I want to do before I went in—what food, talking with my loved ones, talking with my partner at the time, having big conversations about how relationships would work or look like throughout incarceration. All these little practical things that I did, which were somewhat helpful, but also just to keep my mind off it, really.

At the end of the day, you can never prepare for what's coming. You can pretend like you're prepared, but at the end of the day you're going into a whole new world that probably you have no idea what it's like or what it's going to be like. That's something else I did: There were other political prisoners that I wrote letters to who were incarcerated. I said, "Tell me everything," and we would write 5, 10, 15 page letters back and forth for nine months. But again, all little pieces that were helpful, but nothing could have prepared me for what the next three and a half years of my life was going to be like.

Eric King: I was also wildly unprepared. My answer to that would be interpersonal relationships. Build deep connections with someone if you know they're going . It's very tough. We've got people like Casey Goonan, like the Florida Four, there'll be different Atlanta folks fighting Cop City, different folks fighting against zionism, that will inevitably end up inside. What words would you say to them? What would you say to people about supporting prisoners, the value of it, or what would you say to those people going in about the value of their struggle?

Jake Conroy: Why do I gotta go first? [*Laughter all around.*] I will vaguely answer your question with an answer I always give. Political prisoner support for people that are going in—whether you're going in, or whether you are going to support people—the support is a lifeline. I can't stress that enough. I was very lucky that I got letters almost every single day, if my mail was delivered by the prison. Every single day I would have gotten letters. Every single day that's another story. But every letter was like an escape. I would get the letter, I would take it to my cell, I would open it up, I would read it very slowly, 5, 10 minutes, 20 minutes, however long it took me to read it, and then I would put it back in the envelope, and I'd write a letter in response, if I had the stamps to do so. If I was lucky I got 5 letters or 10 letters or 15 letters, and every letter was 10 to 15 minutes plus a reply, and every one of those was a jailbreak. Every one of those was an

going to be ones of sustenance. The prison doesn't want that to happen. So, that's the nature of what you have to deal with. Whoever you are, you'll figure out a way to do that, if you're going to maintain some kind of centeredness.

To me, having a long-term vision that we're part of a struggle to try to transform social relations, that we're trying to destroy the structural nature of empire—and that's a long-term thing—so we can't be so demanding that our survival is going to be predicated on making quick changes or answering all the questions at once, whether we're in or out. I'm well into my 70's, and I'm still trying to figure out some of those questions, but I also feel good about being this old and still being in a position to be able to grapple with the larger questions that are global, that are about what impact or role I can play despite a pretty ugly world out there. I haven't been able to stop the zionists, but I'm going to keep trying, that's for damn sure.

Eric King: Thank you. Jake, briefly, what if you were put down today, or if you had words to advise people on what the best way to support someone today, what would you say?

Jake Conroy: I'm not good being brief, but I'll try my best. I think that I was in a unique position because myself and my co-defendants were allowed to self-surrender. The biggest threat to the security of the United States were found guilty and then put on house arrest for nine months and then self-surrendered to federal prison. So, I actually got to build, essentially, my own support. From a practical standpoint, yes, to all the stuff Claude said. But from a practical standpoint, for me, that meant building my own webpage (because I was a nerd, I built a support webpage). I made a book list of all the books that I would be interested in reading. We did a bunch of fundraising to try to get money into a support fund that then could be dispersed to us in little pieces throughout our incarceration. There were six of us so we each had our own point person, and then those point people were part of a SHAC 7 support fund. There was someone that spearheaded the support fund, and then we had individual support people that we connected to.

What else do we do? I had my paperwork sent in. That's a whole other discussion, but I had my lawyer send my paperwork in so it was there when I got there, so I didn't have too many problems with being labeled

develop a relationship that's based on a different set of values that ultimately sees everybody through whether there's a crisis that's immediate or not. It's about a faith in humanity and a sense of what people can build with one another, even in the harshest circumstances, that to me is very inspiring about what can also take place in the streets, and it sort of underscores a hope in organizing, in mobilizing people, and in challenging some of the backwards stuff that invariably is a product of growing up in a society that has really messed up. Whether that's taking on issues of gender normativity and how that's exercised in violent ways inside, to challenging people's sense of being able to get ahead by collaborating with staff in order to get privileges, that's something that we can struggle with people about, and feel like they're capable of changing their understanding of things, and changing their behavior.

In my experience, that was definitely true. From the jump, these institutions are the epitome of white and male supremacy, and that's certainly inclusive of institutions that are set up to hold women, or people who identify as women, or who are placed in those institutions for whatever reason that are gender non-conforming. It's challenging all the way around, and the values that are enforced by the institution are about insisting on conforming with the most reactionary values that white male worlds create.

So, I think it's an important part of the experience that one recognizes the capacity of people to go beyond that and to transform themselves and to understand who the enemy is in the situation, which is not the guy down the row who has got some money coming in because of gambling or whatever. It's complex, but there's something fundamental about that that was very centering for me, personally. It also becomes a thing about figuring out, how do you contribute to building a different kind of community and a different character among people that are struggling, on the one hand, with living in cages for a long time, but also have to survive and have to have the potential to grow and change? I don't know if that was clear, but...

Eric King: Very clear. Jake, intersectionality, did prison help you expand upon it? Were you already prepared for these sort of things from doing prison support previously? Did it help you view the world differently, or did it change how you viewed the world at all?

Jake Conroy: Yeah, when I first got involved, the idea of intersectionality, or collective liberation, or however you want to classify these types of ideas, were rooted in me pretty early. I certainly was not perfect at it or had a very good political analysis on it, but it was something that was always on my mind and I learned a lot about, and I continue to learn a lot about. When I went into prison, I think that, for me, what it helped me with was a little bit of what Claude's talking about, recognizing humanity and people and the different struggles that everyone has.

It's interesting, because I think about this a lot, but I think it was the last panel that Claude and I talked in together—in San Francisco, the Howard Zinn Bookfair [*December 2023*]—and Claude talked a bit about humanity then, and finding humanity and people in places, including in prison. I thought a lot about that because I think that's what I tried to do, to a certain extent, and maybe didn't really realize it. But I think that offering an opportunity to people to have a conversation in prison was something that didn't just help me, but I think helped a lot of people. I think a lot of people in there were in situations where they had to act a certain way, and they had to believe certain things, and they had to say certain things and carry themselves a certain way, and they didn't have an opportunity—sometimes for years and years, or even decades—to be able to have their humanity and be outside of that caricature that they had to play. And there are a lot of people that were legit that way, they wore those politics, or they wore those beliefs, or they wore that muscle or whatever, but I think there's a lot of people in there that also just were in a position where they had to be a certain way and they didn't have an opportunity to be happy or silly or goofy or ask questions. They didn't feel comfortable asking the people that they are around.

I think the two places I actually saw that happen were in the visiting room, where you'd have a visit, and you'd have all these guys on one side of the visiting room, and all the families would come in, and some of them had their kids that they hadn't seen in 6 months or 12 months or 2 years, and you just see that tough-guy façade just fade away. You just got to see the real side of people, and even more so when the visit was over, and you had to line up on the other side of the visiting room. The way we did it, we all waited there while the families walked out, and you could see them go out the door, and then one whole side of the visiting room was like glass walls so you could see your people just walking away and kids, 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds running across the room trying to give their dad one last

sentencing stuff changes. Obviously not an immediate victory. However, what it did create was a level of organization inside, certainly among Black prisoners, but also to the extent that there was a level of solidarity shown tremendously changed some of the social fabric for a period of time inside.

Some of the struggles are just revelatory in terms of how stupid prisons are. I'll tell one stupid story. I really felt like the library needed a dictionary that talked about the etymology of language, which exists. So this dictionary gets ordered in two volumes which has to do with the etymology of language in English, and the type is so small that the dictionary arrives with a magnifying glass because that's the only way you can read it. Well, of course the magnifying glass isn't allowed in the prison, because it can be seen as a weapon. So, what ends up happening is here's the two volume set of the Oxford English Dictionary, but nobody can read it, because they won't give us the magnifying glass to see what the words are. That's typical. Now, I wouldn't call that a large victory, but it's a victory that unmasks the insanity that goes into creating a structure that wants to prevent people from advancing their own knowledge, and so there you go.

Eric King: For those listening, my one tangible victory, I was in the SHU, and they had already taken away phone calls, visits, and emails. Then the warden said that he was going to take away all books, magazines, newspapers, and radios, because we were using them as contraband, or whatever. Me and Smiles, aka Randy, who was at the ADX with me also, he was facing extra charges and ran the team four days in a row and did a hunger strike the entire four days. After a while the warden just got so tired of having to suit those boys up that he let me and Smiles keep our radios. I felt really tough. I felt so tough. So, briefly, if you were to go down today, right now, what would support look like for you? What sort of support do you think is most necessary for either political prisoners or social prisoners today?

Claude Marks: How come I get to start all the time? Geez. These rules are oppressive. You realize that creating an institutional process by which… Anyway. To me, obviously maintaining connections to family and community and political movements. I mean, how do you fight for that? Well, you just have to. And people do that, and they fight to retain their own humanity inside, and they look to develop relationships that are

seeing all of us come together, from all the different races and all the different gangs, to come together to go down to the mainline where you can approach the warden and the associate warden and be like, "Hey, you got a serious problem here, and if it's not taken care of, you're going to have more problems." And the warden recognizing it—it's a pretty cool story. But in my unit we rallied everyone. We're like, "We need a Sureño, we need a Norteño, we need a Crip, we need a Blood, and let's all get together, and we'll go down there together and air our grievances." I remember walking to the mainline through the prison, and everyone was like, "What the fuck is going on here? This is not what was supposed to be happening." We all pull up to the mainline, and the warden, the associate warden, the captain, and SIS, they all kind of sidle up, like squaring off and looking around like, "What are we supposed to do next?" And someone said, "You've got a real problem with this cop and you need to handle it." And the warden going, "I hear you. I know there's a problem, and we're going to take care of it." Then we're all like, "Well, that's not what we expected to happen." We just kind of backed away, and then within a week the cop was removed out of the prison. It would have been great to have all the cops removed out of the prison, but we'd take one. And that felt like a really big victory, and it gave this sense to people that we are not a white race and a Black race, we are a prison class, and if we organize together and ride together, then we can make a really big change. Unfortunately, I didn't get to see that very often, but the few times that I did felt really special, and I hope that those were lessons that were left with some of the people in there.

Eric King: For those listening who don't know, Jake was at Victorville, a medium, which is amongst the worst when it comes to things like violence and racial prejudice. The place is just a nasty shithole. Glad you're out, bud. Claude, any tangible policy changes or interpersonal victories that you won or accomplished in prison?

Claude Marks: I mean, none of them were personal. I think there were a lot of things happening when I was locked up, everything from who is going to control the heroin trade, to whether or not there was going to be some impact on the differential of sentencing between crack and powder cocaine—which is clearly evidence of white supremacy and the inherent racism of the so-called judicial process—and a tremendous uprising inside to challenge that, basically with Black prisoners taking the position that this is not going to be an institution that you can control unless this

hug, and a cop telling them that they couldn't is heartbreaking. You could see the façade of everyone wash away, and you could see who they really were on the inside.

The only other place I really got to experience that was in my cell. A lot of times people would come in, and they would sit down, and we'd have a conversation. People would ask me to help them learn how to read, or help them with their math homework, or want to talk about the trans women that were in our unit, or the gay people that were incarcerated, or they wanted to talk about veganism, animal rights, environmentalism. Having these conversations were things that people weren't allowed to have or allowed to do, and getting to help facilitate those little pieces of that were really, really exciting for me and felt really special.

Eric King: I love hearing you both talk. I love it. There's a lot of things about post-prison trauma I want to ask, and if we have time I have a lot more questions that I want to get to about prison. But I'd also like to talk about getting out of prison. For me, it's still fresh, of course, but there was lots of trauma. It's not always the stuff that people think about. It's not always the stabbing or fighting or that sort of stuff. There's deep-seated hurt, and I've been fortunate enough to have EMDR therapy and things like that. I was very fortunate to have people support me in the halfway house so that I didn't have to suffer as much while there. I'd really like to ask you both about, if you did struggle when you got out, if you did have hurts, if you did have any sort of trauma that you had to work through, and then what that was like post-prison, whether at the halfway house or at home with your families, what the release was like for you inside?

Claude Marks: Well, I'm not sure if I would use the word trauma exactly in my case, but there isn't a day that goes by that the issue of prison isn't part of it, one way or the other. Whether it's flashing back on something or connected to current work, to me I think it's hard to separate prison from other parts of life. That's also a healthy thing. It's a reminder of where one stands, and that other people are faced with this. So, for me, yes, transitioning out is always complicated. I think it's more complicated for people who've done a lot more time and who are struggling with health issues. For me, that wasn't the case. But I know the number one thing is to make sure that somehow we try to figure out how to support people when they're getting out. In particular, that means getting their ID stuff together, getting access to medical care, catching up with decades of

untreated illness, of harsh treatment. Both physically and psychologically, all those things are real. And there isn't really a support network. There's a big fight in California to make sure that people are getting their $200 gate money. I mean, what's that going to buy you? It's a small thing, and yet they're screwing people out of their gate money. Why? Because that's the nature of it. What does it mean for someone that's been down so long that they're pretty disconnected from family and community and friends to have $200 in their pocket and have to figure out how to survive? I mean, that's nuts. There is a larger responsibility in recognizing the ways in which, even after being released, people who have a history of imprisonment have tremendous challenges in front of them, and there aren't really social structures set up to embrace them as they come back. There are, of course, exceptions, but to me this is part of what building a healthy movement is about. It's not only taking care of people when they're down but taking care of people when they get back. That involves resources, but it also involves centering them and paying them the respect that they deserve for having experienced prison in the first place, and to ensure them that the community will embrace them again, irrespective of what resources they already have lined up

Eric King: Jake, just to rehash, you've met me, and we've done post-prison support talks, and I still suffer or go through a lot of emotional trauma from prison. You've seen me. I still get emotional talking about it. I can still get scared when people are aggressive or whatever, and I had good halfway house support. When I got released, people showed up for me huge, and I still have those traumas and those problems.

So, the question is, have you dealt with any issues since being released? Was the halfway house okay? Were you supported there? Did you carry any trauma with you once you were released, and has that carried on now today?

Jake Conroy: Yes to all of that. I'll preface it by saying I was very lucky. I had lots of support. I had people that were willing to help me out. I had someone that was trying to get me a job, and that sets me ahead of the game there a bit. But being in the halfway house was awful. I didn't want to be there. I would have rather stayed in prison. But that also made me start thinking that I was only in for three and a half years. Am I institutionalized, did that happen that quickly, where I felt more comfortable in prison? And then I started—I still think about this all the

me at this point. But I think that grew out of taking care of my myself, engaging with other movements and communities outside of my own, and learning from people that have done it in the past. Combining those three things together is what really inspires me to continue.

Eric King: I love you both. We have final questions, but before I get to those ones I was wondering if you all could take a couple minutes, I'm going to read or summarize some questions that we've got in the Q&A, and if we can just try to get quick answers. One of the first questions is talking about victories inside. I know when I was inside, I probably did it bad by making everything a struggle, everything was as serious as everything, and it just led to me getting fucked up a bunch. What I really found were the true victories inside was being able to still connect with my family, being able to hold empathy, or being able to be there for other people still and not be so jaded. I would like to know—and they would like to know—if either of you two ever had any tangible victories, like getting things changed for the better, or just personal victories while you were inside.

Jake Conroy: There was little things that I did that felt like I was bettering myself, or just things that I set out to accomplish. One of the things I said when I went in was that I wanted to maintain my sense of self as much as I possibly could. That was a challenge, obviously. But I wanted to make sure I laughed every day, so I found something that I found humor in—which sounds maybe morbid when someone's incarcerated, but you have to find things that make you laugh or smile or make your heart swell, and feel something besides the only emotion you're allowed to have in prison, which is anger. You're only allowed to be mad in prison and angry and upset, and feeling something besides that openly, to me, feels like a little bit of a rebellion. That was something I wanted to do.

There were other things, too. The prison I was in was very racially divided. There's a lot of division, and you were expected, as a white person, to do certain things and fall in line with certain policies and culture. Me being able to push back against that and do my own time in a way that I wanted to, that didn't mean me adhering to racial politics or gang politics, felt like a very big personal victory. That was very important to me.

There were times when we had problems within the prison in terms of the inmates having problems with a particular cop. For a very brief moment

my sense of self. But it was also searching out and talking to people that had gone through it before, like Claude, so that I could ask questions and learn from the people that did it before me. I talked to as many people as I possibly could or just went to talks and listened to people at Claude's space. You used to have political prisoners come and speak about their experiences and I would go and listen.

I remember talking with Claude's co-defendant Donna Jean Willmott. When she got out, I asked her what it was like when she got out, this very question, and she said there was a cosmonaut that was in space who was from the USSR. The USSR collapsed while he was in space, and he had no way to get back, because his country was gone. She said that eventually when he came back to Earth his whole country was gone. It no longer was the USSR. She said that she felt a lot like that cosmonaut. And that really hit home to me. I still remember her telling me that, and I could relate a lot to it in a way that—I am a cosmonaut—no, I'm just kidding, I could relate to it a lot in that I felt that also, that loss of community. I didn't know where I fit anymore. My movement and my community had changed, the campaigns and the strategies and the theories of change that we had were all gone. They were something new that I didn't really agree with.

For me, the other pieces I did that were important to me was I got involved in movements and activism outside of the animal rights movement, like a wide variety of different communities I could go to and engaging them as a participant as opposed to an organizer. I think this is something we should all do who are involved in activist spaces—we should participate in other movements as participants and learn from them, see how they organize, what they're doing right and what they're doing wrong, what works, what isn't working, how can we change those things in our own communities, to grow on them and grow from them. So I did a lot of that, being in organizing spaces as the participant and bringing those lessons back to the animal rights movement and beyond, and having conversations about "This is what I've done in the past, and this is how other movements are doing it now, and these are how they bridge together and come together." If we can take all these different pieces and create this new theory of change, I think we can move forward more successfully. That work really excited me, because I want to see change in the world, and trying to figure out the best way to do that by learning from the past and experimenting with the future is what drives

time—does becoming institutionalized happen that quickly, and if so, what a frightening thing, that we have millions and millions and millions of people that go through the system, and they can be institutionalized so quickly, where they would rather be incarcerated than one step closer to being home.

Every prison is different. Every system's different. Everyone's experiences are different. For me, my experiences, I was in a fairly rough prison for 25 months before I got transferred, but there was a lot of fights and riots and gang warfare and stabbings and beatings every day. All that stuff was happening and there are certain ways you're supposed to carry yourself. If someone disrespects you or cuts you in line then it's go time. You've got to fight that person. So, when I got out, and I'm waiting in line at the bus stop in San Francisco, and someone cuts me in line, I can feel my heart start racing, like "What the fuck, did this guy just cut me in line? How dare he." And you have to go through your head, "Hey, it's okay, bud. Calm down." You have to take yourself down a notch.

One of the ways that you had to behave in prison was that when you wake up in the morning, you had to put your shoes on. You couldn't walk around all day in your slides, or your shower shoes, because if there was a fight, you can't fight in shower shoes. You have to wear shoes from the time that they open your cell to the time that they close the cell, so taking your shoes off was not an option. When you get out of prison, for me, and this still sits with me, I go to a friend's house and it's like, "Oh, we're a shoes off house, and you've got to take your shoes off," and I'm like, "I can't." How do you have that conversation? "Well, I can't take off my shoes in your house because it means that if a fight breaks out, how am I going to fight?" In a way, it effects you traumatically in certain cases. It's like PTSD. There is also that feeling, maybe a little bit of shame. It's like, "How do I have this conversation?" particularly if it's someone that's not from an activist background. If I go to my uncle's house or my mom's house, or just some person I just met, and they're like, "Hey, take your shoes off," and you're like, "Well, I can't because I was in prison."

There's all these tiny little pieces, they're almost like anchors that were thrown down when you're in prison, and that chain just keeps dragging you as you get out. But I was lucky. I knew from the very beginning I needed to go to therapy. My halfway house wasn't going to let me, they said no, and I had to fight them tooth and nail to be able to go to a low-

income therapist who I worked with for six years. She legitimately saved me. I was able to do that work, and that helped me out a lot. But that's not to say that it's all gone, that those remnants and pieces still don't stick with me, just a little more faint. But I also think it's important to hang on to them in certain regard so that we can talk about them. If you're able and capable to share these things, we should, because this is an awful, awful system that we're all thrown into. Whether we're activists or not, everyone in the prison system essentially is a political prisoner by the very nature of the prison industrial complex, what it is, and so I think it's important that we who can tell these stories and share these stories, no matter how awful or upsetting they may be, we do our best to share them, because we need to continue to talk about the issues and what happens when people get out.

Eric King: I'm not going to say their name because of security culture, but I'd love to give a big shout out to my therapists because they offer their work to me *pro bono*. I don't know what I'd do without them. I cry all the time with therapy. I'd be a firecracker without it. Something I respect about both of you is your continued work post-prison. Jake, I don't know if I told you this story, but the first time I talked to Claude, I was respecting how that past generation, our elders, stuck with it and saw it to the end, like he said. And I admired that. I was telling him I don't know if I see the same thing in my generation, like I don't know who's continuing. And the first name he brought up was you. He brought it up almost instantly, like, "Have you met Jake?" I was like, "I actually have not met Jake, but I read his chapter [in *Rattling the Cages*]." That was something, that he had a lot of respect for you. And it's also something, now that I know you, I respect the shit out you, because it's hard to keep working post-prison. It's hard to do these things. So, I would like to ask both of you, how was it getting back to activism post-prison and what have you done that gives you that sense of fulfillment, or that sense of like "I'm doing good work?" What are you doing, and how does that make you feel while you're doing it?

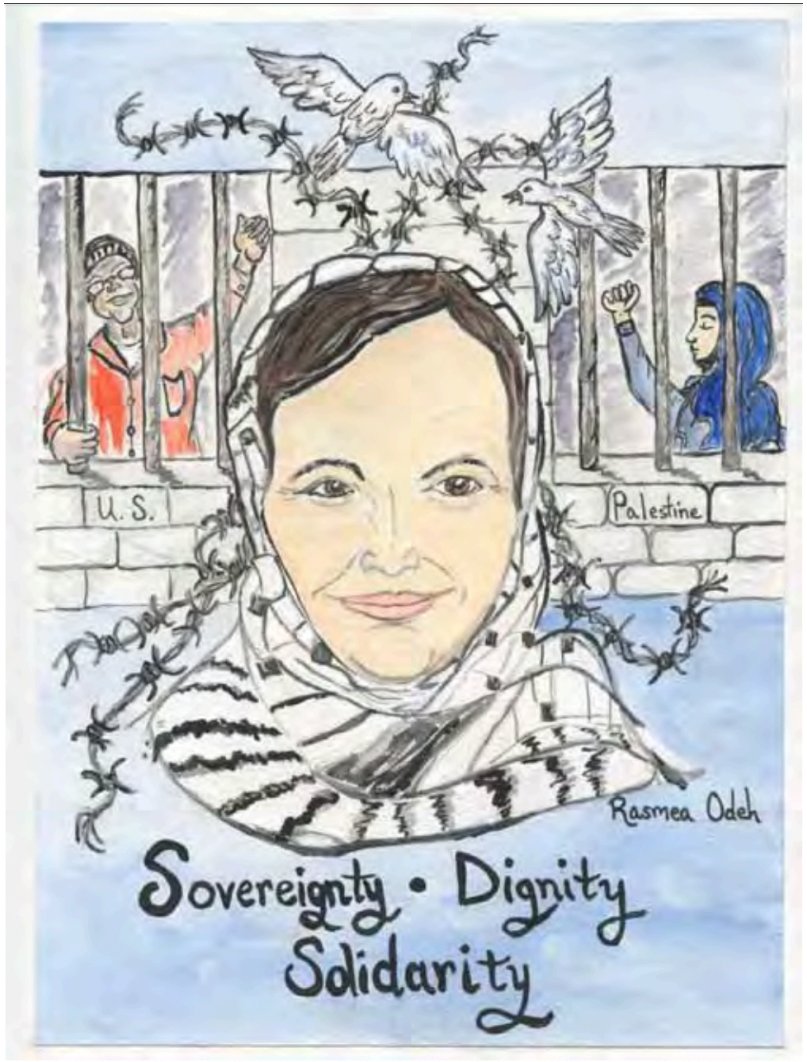
Claude Marks: One thing for me is that once I got out I kept doing prison related work. There were a lot of ways in which that manifests—ongoing work to free political prisoners, visiting prisons, visiting political prisoners. I was part of the formation of All of Us or None, which is an organization of former prisoners demanding a decriminalization of post-prison life. In many aspects, that has a domestic character to it. I just for the first time recently visited Kevin Cooper, who still faces a death penalty in California, because I think his is an important case to be involved in. He's challenging his conviction as a juvenile, essentially with huge amounts of tainted evidence. I won't go into details, but take a look at Kevin Cooper when you get a chance.

But also understanding that imprisonment has its forms outside the boundaries of the US. As was mentioned I think at the beginning, I was part of forming and participating in a delegation of people involved in challenging imprisonment in the US and former political prisoners that traveled to Palestine. Part of what we did in advance of actually going was putting together a pamphlet of solidarity statements from people imprisoned in the US with the Palestinian struggle, which got translated into Arabic and printed so that we didn't have to carry it into the country through Israeli security. We were able to distribute and talk about ways in which it's important to understand building solidarity between prisoners in various struggles around the world. All of these kinds of things, to me, constitute not breaking stride, so I feel like that's not uncommon for people getting out, and I think it's something that should be uplifted. There's different ways of doing it, but to me it's integral to how I identify in the world, not only having experienced it, but maintaining a connection to abolition politics, to supporting political prisoners as well, and to an understanding that political imprisonment, for sure, is part of a global experience of people who choose to participate in some liberatory politics and resistance against genocide.

Eric King: Thank you so much. Jake, since being released how have you found activism? Were you scared? Was it hard to get back into it? I have found for me that doing prison solidarity work is just about the most rewarding thing I can do. It gives me literally the most feeling of safety and joy that I can get, outside of family stuff. How has activism been for you since getting released? You have stuck with it, so I'd like to hear about your experiences in that.

Jake Conroy: Yeah, that's awesome that you've jumped back into it so quickly. This is a big question for me, and I talk about it a lot. But I'll try to condense it, but it was many different parts.

One, I needed to take care of myself. I knew that I needed help in doing that and that was searching out, as I said earlier, finding therapy to regain



The cover of the pamphlet of solidarity statements from people imprisoned in the US to the Palestinian struggle. (The drawing is by Marius Mason, a long-time activist in the environmental and labor movements. In March 2008, he was arrested by federal authorities for charges related to two acts of property destruction that occurred in 1999 and 2000; no one was injured in either of them. He was sentenced to just under 22 years.)

FORMER PALESTINIAN POLITICAL PRISONER SHEIKH KHADER ADNAN EXPRESSES SOLIDARITY WITH PELICAN BAY HUNGER STRIKERS

JULY 9, 2013

Sheikh Khader Adnan considers the policy of isolation as a cheap weapon in the hands of those who hold power. The policy of isolation is used against American citizens who are victims of the political, economic, and social order/system that thrives on greed, discrimination, and the deprived, including the African-Americans and Palestinian resistors such as Sameeh Hamoudeh and Sami Al-Aryan.

The policy of isolation exposes the ugly face of these false democracies that are guilty of occupation, tyranny, and social repression. Hunger strikes are a courageous step and a real tool for all those who are deprived of their rights to lift the existing oppression, and I hope that these prisoners will gain their rights and their demands. Today, the hunger strikes of the Palestinian prisoners inspires those who are detained to engage in hunger strikes tro guarantee that they are treated humanely and with respect and dignity.

I am a former administrative detainee in the Israeli Occupations' prisons, who has been subjected to the unjust isolation policy. I fought in a hunger strike for 66 consecutive days against the policy of administrative detention, my detention without charge or trial. I announce my full solidarity with my 30,000 oppressed brothers in the American prisons, and I ask that the American people and government end the policy of isolation of the detainees and prisoners, and comply by human rights law that forbids continuous isolation because of its destructive effects on the mental and physical health of detainees.

March 2016 - Anonymous

"All the progressives and revolutionaries in the world dedicate their lives to the same hopes and dreams. We all stand for social justice and liberation in Palestine, the U.S., and the entire world. We all stand for freedom for Palestinian political prisoners and all political prisoners!

In addition, anyone who has spent any time incarcerated in the U.S. fully understands the oppression that people of color, and especially Black people, face in this society. We recognize the racism that they face, the dehumanization, the fact that so many were incarcerated for non-violent crimes, the poverty, the refusal of this government to understand the socio-economic and psychological conditions that are the cause of the vast majority of alleged crimes in this country.

The Israeli government portrays the Palestinian political activist as a criminal and a terrorist, which makes incarceration doubly hard; but in Palestine, at least prisoners have a shared national liberation struggle when facing the prison guards and administration. Here in the U.S., the political prisoner has to work very hard with other prisoners to build a shared struggle. When relationships are built with other incarcerated people, the prison authorities move you away to isolation in a freezing cold cell, extremely small, with no access to blankets, warm clothes, or human contact. The only thing visible from the isolation cells is the light bulb outside. The door is made of thick glass with only a small opening for food to be sent through. It is hard to choose the worst thing about isolation, because the whole experience is bad. The most frightening thing is the feeling that they truly want to destroy you or turn you into a tool, like a remote control that responds to their requests and their orders.

The whole system of incarceration is designed to destroy people's humanity and make them despair and feel hopeless. Humans are social, so to be in isolation not only cuts you off from other people, but also affects you by cutting you off from yourself. It destroys you emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually, and makes you feel as if you are no longer whole—this is the deadliest thing.

That is the toughest challenge being a political prisoner, or a prisoner of any kind in the U.S. But challenges are not frightening, because as long as we believe in our rights and the principles that we stand for, have confidence in ourselves, and rise up together, we become stronger and more effective. Then we can achieve miracles. People in the U.S. and all across the world support our Palestinian rights of return, self- determination, independence, and freedom for Palestinian political prisoners. Prisoners in the U.S. especially send their love, respect, and honor to prisoners in Palestine. Despite all challenges, collective victory for U.S. prisoners and Palestinian prisoners is in our future."

a solidarity statement included in the pamphlet
Claude Marks helped to distribute in Palestine